



CASE STUDY

Treating Laminitis the *Natural* Way

by *Cindy Daigre*

Many people in the horse world consider laminitis a dirty word – one we hope we never have to utter and surely never have to experience firsthand. Laminitis is inflammation of the tiny, interlocking layers (laminae) that attach the coffin bone to the rest of the hoof within the hoof wall. Laminitis can be so painful that those of us with horses who may be at risk for developing this condition use the adage “Avoid Laminitis At All Costs!”

There are many causes for laminitis. The culprit we hear about most often is carbohydrate overload – eating too much starchy grain or sugary spring grass. However, it can also be caused by: side effects of medications such as corticosteroids, metabolic imbalances, over-working horses on hard surfaces, weather changes, or it can be of mechanical origin such as excessive weight on one leg.

Laminitis may be mild, severe, just starting, lying low, or raging, so the visible signs can range from almost undetectable tenderness when turning or walking to complete inability to put any weight on the hooves. (Laminitis can occur in one or all four hooves.) Palpable clues include a bounding digital pulse and heat in the hoof. The artery and pulse can be found on both the inside and outside of the fetlock joint. When forehoof pain or lameness is present, the horse will shift weight to the hind end, often standing parked out in the front, or he may lie down, in attempts to alleviate some of the pressure and pain from the hoof tissue dying inside the affected hooves. Abscesses can appear secondary to this loss of blood supply and death of tissue, or from bacterial infection.

Francis's Story

Horses who have been worked consistently on hard surfaces can sometimes develop what is often called “road founder”. In September 2009, I adopted an older, 1,300-pound Percheron/ Friesian gelding named Francis who had worked his life as a carriage horse, most notably on the streets of New York City. When he arrived at Ferrell Hollow Farm, his feet were in desperate need of a trim and he had flat soles. He had other issues such as ringbone, sidebone and a right-hind contracted deep digital flexor tendon. X-rays of his feet revealed what my vet termed as “chronic laminitis”. He was foot sore and uncomfortable, and we are certain that the years he spent in metal shoes and pounding away on pavement contributed to his condition.

Since his arrival at Ferrell Hollow Farm, Francis has been

maintained with natural methods. He has a barefoot trim every four weeks. Due to the contracted tendon, he is unable to lift his left hind foot for a trim so we place his foot on a piece of plywood and trim using nippers and a rasp. Vasodilation herbs yarrow and hawthorn are fed to increase the blood flow to his feet to bring in healing nutrients and carry off wastes. Gotu kola is given for its ability to work with the collagen in the body and, therefore, helps to address the contracted tendon. The adaptogenic herbs Siberian ginseng, rose root, Chinese magnolia vine and Asian devil's club are also fed to combat the effects of stress. In addition, stabilized flax meal is fed for its known benefits to coat and hoof quality as well as its anti-inflammatory effects. Due to the changes we have made in Francis's management, he is doing well and feeling better every day!

Haley's Story

Mechanical laminitis often occurs when one leg bears excessive weight over time. Treatment is complicated as it is difficult, and even dangerous, to work on the affected foot. Haley is a 1,400-pound French Warmblood who has been left with nerve damage from the ravages of the neurological disorder, Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis. His left hind leg turns outward while the right hind leg bears most of the weight. During the past 15 months, he

Where to feel for the digital pulse - 'X' marks the spot.





Due to his career as a carriage horse, Francis has a history of 'road founder'.



Haley has struggled with recurring 'mechanical laminitis' and subsequent abscesses for over a year.

has had multiple episodes of mechanical laminitis in his right hind hoof with subsequent abscesses. While treatment remains difficult, natural methods are used to help alleviate his distress.

At the first sign of foot pain, therapeutic ice boots are used – a bell boot for the hoof and a shin boot for the supporting leg that bears most of the weight. After icing, an herbal liniment containing arnica is used from the hock to the coronary band. Biochemical tissue salts, which are homeopathically prepared mineral salts that work on a molecular level and address imbalances in the body, are given for inflammation and pain every few hours. Anti-inflammatory herbs such as devil's claw and white willow bark are used for the pain. Vasodilation herb combinations of yarrow and hawthorn are given daily to stimulate blood flow to the feet. He has an open-front stall that has a foam padded wall that he can lean on for support, and the floor is thickly bedded with shavings. It's interesting to note that he will pick up each hind foot periodically and hold it up for a few seconds. This action stimulates blood flow in each foot, which is critical for healing.

Abscessing does happen

Often times after a laminitic episode, an abscess will occur in the affected hoof. There will be a notable increase in foot pain and in most cases the horse is very lame. Abscesses can cause severe pain and take days or even weeks to come to the surface. Bacteria or necrotic tissue will exit most often from the coronary band or the bulb of the heel. Once the abscess begins to drain, pressure in the foot starts to be relieved, and the pain decreases.

Anti-inflammatories are contra-indicated for abscess pain as they can delay the time it takes for the abscess to mature. However, homeopathic Arnica (given orally), well-known as the bruising and trauma remedy, can assist with the pain and discomfort while Hepar sulph and Silicea (also in the tissue salts) are known for helping to ripen and open abscesses. If a soaking boot can be fitted, it should be filled with warm water and tea tree oil to assist in drawing out wastes and bacteria. If swelling or heat is present, ice boots would be used. When the abscess finally opens, the wound can be cleaned daily with a colloidal silver solution such as Silver Mineral Water. A cotton ball or piece of gauze can be soaked

in the silver solution and attached to the opening. Warm water soaks with Lavender essential oil will also help clean and heal the wound.

After a recent abscess episode, Haley spent two days on stall rest and on the third day was able to hobble outside and enjoy the spring grass for a few hours. Icing, herbs, tissue salts, homeopathics and essential oils have all assisted him in the healing process.

Yes, laminitis is, indeed, a dirty word – but it is sometimes unavoidable. Thankfully, a combination of natural remedies, if used consistently and correctly, can help alleviate the extreme discomfort associated with this unfortunate condition. ♪

About the author:

Cindy Daigre is the founder and director of Ferrell Hollow Farm, an Equine Retirement facility in Tennessee focusing on the unique concerns of Senior and Special Needs horses. In addition, she provides Equine Nutritional Consultations and has developed a specialized line of Natural Horse Care Products.
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